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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



SUMMER 1996

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE. . . HARBINGER

As I read a paper that crossed my desk recently, the headline of an article caught my eye. The headline read, "Decker: Organic Produce Gives Roadside Stands an Edge." The article, which was written by Michelle Calvert, was not long but contained interesting tidbits of useful information and sends a message. Therefore, I'm making the article available to the readers of *Small-Scale Agriculture Today*.

"Decker's Produce Company, a wholesale house specializing in supplying roadside stands, began buying produce direct from California this year, according to Debbie Decker, buyer and salesperson for the company. In addition, the company is finding new sources for organic produce, which is being demanded by farm markets and consumers alike.

"There's actually been a large call for (organic produce),' Decker reported. 'A lot of the road stands are starting to feel the pressure from supermarkets and large chain stores, so many of them are switching over to organic produce to be competitive and have an edge.'

"Stating that large retailers don't engage in 'fair competition anymore,' Decker said grocery stores 'will look at what (produce items) the road stand is selling and they will purposely lower their price. It's getting to be too much.'

"Furthermore, the trend for more organic produce is being fueled by consumer demand. 'People around here have become more health conscious and have inquired about organic produce,' Decker mentioned.

"She said sources for good quality organic produce are become more available, especially out of California. In the Northeast, more local farmers are growing organic items, according to Decker, so produce is available in New York during its growing season. Currently, Decker said she is getting her organic supplies from California because she can have them loaded on trucks with other produce purchases.

"Prices have been reasonable for organic items, Decker reported, saying prices on some items are the same as non-organic items. 'I can sell regular and organic green leaf for about the same price. I think (organic produce) is coming into its own, where it will start leveling off in price,' she said.

"Decker's Produce had 'average' business during the past, according to Decker who said her father, Jerry Decker, handles apples, peaches and tomatoes, while her mother, Phyllis Decker, takes care of selling wholesale plants and flowers. Decker's Produce, located at the Capital District regional market in Menands (near Albany), supplies more than 100 roadside stands throughout the year."

(Excerpted from *The Produce News*, Vol. 99, No. 9, Fort Lee, NJ, March 21, 1996, p. 30. Reprinted with permission of Gordon M. Hochberg, Editor)

For the record, Webster defines the word "harbinger" as follows: "a: One that pioneers in or initiates a major change: precursor; b: One that presages or foreshadows what is to come: forerunner." Yes, in this message there definitely is an underlying theme or idea for small-scale producers and marketers. (Comments of Howard W. "Bud" Kerr, Jr., Director, USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250-2244)

MANY THANKS!

Over 2,000 readers of this newsletter contacted the Office for Small-Scale Agriculture (OSSA) in response to the request to update your mailing address. Your cooperation was very much appreciated. In addition, the corrections permit you to read this issue. Thanks!

TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

New - The fact sheet entitled *Grade A Dairy Goat Farm Requirements* is available for goat producers. Contact: Nelson Escobar, Agricultural Research and Extension Programs, Langston University, P.O. Box 730, Langston, OK 73050; telephone: 405-466-3836.

Freebie - *Sustainable Agriculture in Print: Current Periodicals, 1995* (SRB 95-08) is an annotated guide to periodicals related to sustainable agriculture. For a free copy, contact: Jane Gates, USDA-ARS/NAL, Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, 10301 Baltimore Blvd., Beltsville, MD 20705-2351; telephone: 301-504-6559.

General Rule - There is a decrease in temperature of 3.3 degrees Fahrenheit for every increase of 1,000 feet in altitude. Therefore, at progressively higher elevations, the temperatures are cooler and a longer season is required to produce a crop.

Kinship - *Sweden: The Nation's History* (688 pages, \$48 cloth, \$28 paper) delineates two centuries of cultural development, and also details the way the common people raised crops, mined ore, and harvested the forests to keep the economy afloat. Contact: Dan Seiters, Southern Illinois University Press, P.O. Box 3697, Carbondale, IL 62902-3697; telephone: 618-453-2281.

Free Catalog - *The Farmers' & Gardeners' Resource Catalog* contains dozens of agricultural, gardening, and herb books. Send requests to New World Publishing, 3085 Sheridan Street, Placerville, CA 95667, or find it on their Web site at <http://www.innercite.com/~newworld>

Think Ahead - If you produce a fruit or vegetable crop that requires honey bees for pollination, become a beekeeper. However, don't do it now; begin this activity next winter when life is less hectic. There is much to learn!

Every Farmer's Goal - Get more production from less acreage!

Tip - Boron is toxic to many vegetable crops, and care must be taken when developing a garden rotation plan. Beans, peas and cucurbits are especially sensitive to boron residue.

About Cucurbits - Cucumbers, pumpkins, watermelon, musk-melon, and summer and winter squash require warm growing conditions and will not tolerate frost!

Scenes, Stories, and Recipes - Forty diverse individuals from Fresno's Vineyard Farmers Market tell their stories in *Abundant Harvest*. The 185-page book costs \$22. Contact: Sharon Young, Sixth Street Press, 3943 North Sixth Street, Fresno, CA 93726; telephone/fax: 209-229-4282.

Question - The average American eats: (a) 3, (b) 6, or (c) 9 pounds of peanuts and peanut products every year. Answer is somewhere in this newsletter.

Simple As - ABC's: Always Be Careful when using farm equipment.

Some History - The USDA was first represented in the Cabinet as the independent Department of Agriculture in 1889. However, USDA's true beginnings were in the U.S. Patent Office. Three years after the Patent Office became a separate office (July 4, 1836) the office was granted \$1,000 for scientific agricultural purposes.

Seed Saver Contacts - For information about open-pollinated and heritage seeds, contact:

- Kent Whealy, Seed Savers Exchange, 3076 N. Winn Rd., Decorah, IA 52101; telephone/fax: 319-382-5872; or
- Tessa Gowans, Abundant Life Seed Foundation, P.O. Box 772, Port Townsend, WA 98368; telephone: 360-385-5660.

12 Issues - Only \$25: *Goat Rancher* is the magazine of America's commercial meat goat industry. Contact: Terry Hankins, 731 Sandy Branch Road, Sarah, MS 38665; telephone/fax: 601-562-9529.

Popular - "Low acid white flesh peaches and nectarines are being grown in ever-increasing numbers in California. They are still only a small percentage of total production, but there are significant new plantings, so the volume is expected to increase dramatically over the next several years." (*The Produce News*, May 13, 1996, p. 67).

Advice - "A healthy population of European bees, kept that way by beekeepers regularly re-queening hives with honey bees of known docile parentage, may be an area's best defense against the spread of Africanized hybrids. . ." Hachiro Shimanuki, USDA-ARS, National Coordinator, Africanized Honey Bee Program (*Agricultural Research*, March 1996, p. 2).

Easy to Prepare - *Life's Simple Pleasures* is a 160-page cookbook triumph for those who love to entertain with vegetarian meals that are nutritious and pleasing to the eye as well as the palate. The cost is \$19.95. Contact: Karen Mangum, Harvest Press, 267 Old Saybrook Drive, Boise, ID 83706; telephone: 1-800-879-4214; fax: 208-385-7166.

Marketing - The 12-page report *Farmers Markets '96: The What's Hot/What's Not Guide for Growers and Managers* reveals the latest farmers market tips and trends. To order, send \$5.00 to World Publishing, 3085 Sheridan Street, Placerville, CA 95667; telephone: 916-622-2248.

Environmentally Safe - Dispose of weeds in patio cracks by dousing them with boiling water.

Making Sense - Use a summer green manure crop to provide soil cover before tilling; smothered weeds provide organic matter, and—if legumes are used—add nitrogen to the soil. Really, it makes cents!

Reflections - The memories of a Vermont small farm in the 1940's are recalled in the 216-page book *Farm in the Green Mountains*. The book costs \$13.95. Contact: Maggie Rosa, The New England Press, Box 575, Shelbourne, VT 05482; telephone: 802-863-2520.

Survey Results - Data from the first year of the current 3-year USDA nationwide food consumption survey, *What We Eat In America*, is available. Contact: Sharon Mickle, USDA-ARS, Beltsville Human Nutrition Center, 4700 River Road, Unit 83, Riverdale, MD 20737; telephone: 301-734-8457, fax: 301-734-5496.

Distinguished Career - *Over-Fulfilled Expectations: A Life and Era in Rural America* by Harold F. Breimyer is 300 pages that detail the ever-shifting focus of government programs for agriculture over three decades. The cost is \$38.95. Contact: Irene Faass, Iowa State University Press, 2121 South State Avenue, Ames, IA 50014-8300; telephone: 1-800-862-6657.

Unique - Chickens are the most useful animal because they are versatile. In fact, you can eat them before or after they are born! (p.s. But **Not** before they are thoroughly cooked!)

Gardening - Backyard gardeners and some small-scale farming ventures must operate in very small spaces; therefore, it is important to rotate crops. Repeating the same crop only depletes specific nutrients from the soil and enables garden insects to become well established.

Northern - *The Country Gazette*, which costs only \$23.40 for 12 copies, is Wisconsin's country magazine providing wit, wisdom, and memories for readers of every age. Contact: Kymerly Pekrul, *The Country Gazette*, P.O. Box 248, Mt. Calvary, WI 53057-0248; telephone: 414-923-1888.

Answer - (c) 9 pounds.

Fulfillment - *Garden Birds of America*, which contains 80 color photos on 160 pages, is a bird book for gardeners and a garden book for birders. The cost is \$33.50. Contact: Karen Lisowski, Willow Creek Press, P.O. Box 147, Minocqua, WI 54548; telephone: 1-800-850-9453.

Dry Weather - "Now the fourth-generation farmer is considering whether to leave the land. His words: I've been farming since I was big enough to sit on a tractor with my grandpa. But farming isn't fun anymore. It's just a job now, so I might as well find myself a better one." (*The Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 1996, p. A-15).

Tip - Always remember that customers like to take home a product that is ripe. They don't want to take home a peach or plum that has to sit on the counter 4 or 5 days!

Home Gardener - *The 1996 Gardener's Source Guide* is an invaluable resource that offers 1,187 individual listings and is a directory of 900 mail order sources. The cost is \$5.95 postpaid. Contact: Bob Armstrong, Gardeners' Source Guide, P.O. Box 20655A, Gowanda, NY 14070-0206.

Tip - When dividing perennials, pick out three or four vigorous shoots for replanting as a group of shoots rather than as single stems.

Clever - While other mulches work well, black plastic seems to work very well; so use it as "mulch" as possible!

Caution - However, if you are using plastic mulch in your garden, soils can sometimes get too hot and plant growth will slow or cease. To counteract these problems, irrigate or use an organic mulch.

Mulching - If you are using grass clippings for mulch in your flower or vegetable gardens, be sure that the lawn has not been treated with a herbicide.

New - Bromfield's *New Agriculture* is back after a half-century's absence. The material has been edited into a new 318-page book, *Return To Pleasant Valley*, by George DeVault, former editor of *New Farm* magazine. The book costs \$19.95 (postpaid). Contact: Keith Crotz, *The American Botanist*, Box 532, Chillicothe, IL 61523; telephone: 309-274-5254.

Space Saver - As soon as the first cucumber fruits develop, pinch back the vine ends to prevent further spreading of the vines.

Just Do It - "Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person" . . . Mother Teresa.

And Another - "Leadership is action, not position" . . . Donald H. McGannon.

Stewards of the Land - *Take It from Maryland Farmers . . . 5 Backyard Actions for a Cleaner Chesapeake Bay* brochure encourages homeowners to apply specific measures to home, lawn and garden projects, and thus join Maryland farmers to protect all water resources. For a free copy, contact: Rona Flagle, Maryland Department of Agriculture, 50 Harry S Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401; telephone: 410-531-1757.

Communication - If you need marketing help, a good source is *The Executive Speechwriter Newsletter*. It is a very helpful 16-page publication full of quotes, jokes, stories, and ideas. It is published six times a year and costs \$79 per year. Contact: Anne Leverette, Words Inc., Emerson Falls Business Park, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819; telephone: 802-748-4472, fax: 802-748-1939.

Landscape Tip - Overhead deciduous plants provide welcome filtered shade in summer and let the warming sun shine through in winter.

HEALTH TIPS

- Use less salt. Be a label reader. Look for low sodium and low fat levels in foods.
- Use herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods.
- Be physically active. Walk. Take the stairs, whenever possible. Keep moving.
- Quit smoking. Urge a friend to quit with you.
- If you are overweight, lose weight; losing one pound a week can make a big difference.
- If you drink, limit your intake of alcohol.
- Get your blood pressure checked regularly.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 11, 1996 - 10th Annual Blackberry/Blueberry Day, Blackstone, VA. Contact: Herbert D. Stiles, Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center, P.O. Box 448, Blackstone, VA 23824; telephone: 804-292-5331.

July 18th - 11th Annual International Herb Conference, San Diego, CA. Contact: John Stygar, International Herb Association, 1202 Allanson Road, Mundelein, IL 60060; telephone: 847-949-4372; fax: 847-566-4580.

July 14-16, 1996 - The 1996 Ohio International Floral Short Course Trade Show, Cincinnati Convention Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. Contact: Michelle L. Gaston, Ohio Florists' Association, 2130 Stella Court, Suite 200, Columbus, OH 43215-1033; telephone: 614-487-1117; fax: 614-487-1216.

August 1-3, 1996 - American Cheese Society's 1996 Conference, Hyde Park, NY. Contact: Ruth Flore, Vermont Butter & Cheese Company, P.O. Box 95, Pitman Road, Websterville, VT 05678; telephone: 1-800-884-6287.

August 4-9, 1996 - First International Conference on Mycorrhizae, Berkeley, CA. Contact: Krebs Conference Services, 555 DeHaro Street, Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94107-2348; telephone: 415-255-1297; fax: 415-255-2244.

August 9-11, 1996 - Twenty-Second Conference of the Northeast Organic Farming Association, Amherst, MA. Contact: Julie Rawson, 411 Sheldon Road, Barre, MA 01005; telephone: 508-355-2853.

August 16-17, 1996 - 1996 Holistic Resource Management, Kahler Hotel, Rochester, MN. Contact: Audrey Arner, Land Stewardship Project, 2200 4th Street, White Bear Lake, MN 55110; telephone: 612-269-2105.

August 24, 1996 - Duke Homestead Herb Festival, Durham, NC. Contact: Edna Lovelace Gaston, 2828 Duke Homestead Road, Durham, NC 27705; telephone: 919-477-5498.

September 8-10, 1996 - GrowTech '96 Conference, Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami, Florida. Contact: GrowTech '96, c/o RAI/EGI Exhibitions, 129 Park Street, North Redding, MA 01864; telephone: 508-664-8066.

September 28-29, 1996 - Future Harvest Festival, Westminster, MD. Contact: Marty Rice, Maryland Organic Food & Farming Association, 6201 Harley Rd., Middletown, MD 21769-6516; telephone: 301-371-4814; fax: 301-371-8923.

October 5-6, 1996 - Denver Alternative Livestock Seminar, Canon City, CO 81212. Contact: Bill or Becky Lowe, 1611 Park Avenue, Canon City, CO 81212; telephone: 719-275-0296.

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